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TRAVELLING TO DILI TO SEE THE POPE

Monday 9 October, Oecussi, East Timor

Up at 6 for the 6.30am bus to Dili. The locals have been consulted. All agree that the bus will stop at the losmen, even the Timorese policeman who scopped by for a chat at 11.0pm last night. At 6.45am the Chinese proprietor of the losmen observes that none have come to the losmen but that all have left for Dili. "Tomorrow" is her first suggestion. "But I must go today", I insist. "Maybe you can go with that truck", she suggests.

It is soon arranged. The truck, hired by Anwar, a Javanese chemist from Dili, has just made its first delivery to this western part of East Timor. While the Timorese driver, Johannes, attends the Police station to get the required 'surat jalan' (travel pass), Anwar and Têos, the driver's off-sider help the inquisitive tourist with Tetun, the language of East Timor. "I already have many Timorese friends", Anwar announces proudly. "I was animistic before I converted to Islam", reveals Têos, the offsider from Los Palos with an equal exhibition of pride. Those who speak of East Timor's integration into Indonesia would be happy indeed to hear such agreeable talk.

Johannes returns with the 'surat jalan', and we leave Oecussi in high spirits. The coastal road takes us back into West Timor. It is a tourist's paradise - thatched huts, white sandy beaches and mountains that rise out of the sea are a photographer's delight. We stop several times as this is the first trip any of us have made on this road and we must follow the tracks made by this morning's buses. At one stage we have to make a choice - to the left is the beach road; ahead a track winding up through the mountains, and to the right a track heading inland. We turn right. The track meanders through a pocket of thriving vegetation due for re-growth following recent bushfires. The banana and palm forest is thick enough to obscruct our vision of the road ahead. The track comes to an end so we turn back. We try the mountain track which is too steep for our truck to negotiate. By a system of elimination, (and a tip from a passer by), we head back to the coastal road. A huge fish trap which looks like a bamboo oil-rig sits several hundred metres out from the shore, and large cane salt 'sieves' are fine examples of appropriate technology in a place where President Suharto's hand of development is yet to reach.

We are hailed by villagers not long after leaving Wini. The driver agrees to carry 40 of the villagers' cane wall panels to Dili. "We cannot grow food here so we make walls", a woman explains. The driver is pleased to have picked up some extra business. "Since 'independence' it is much easier to make money" he says enthusiastically though not with much conviction. The conversation is likely to be safe when your Javanese employer sits beside you, no matter how reasonable and likeable he or she might be.

At Silaba, now called Batugade, we re-enter East Timor and the reality of life in an occupied territory is quickly upon us. We alight from the truck, the tourist with his passport and Têos with his papers. The tourist is shown customary courtesy and the Timorese is asked to pay the customary bribe. It seems that although the police office issued an exit permit which enabled us to leave East Timor at Oecussi, it did not issue a permit enabling us to re-enter East Timor at Silaba. The Javanese police officer asks for and receives 5000 rupiah, and Johannes seems satisfied that sufficient 'retribusi'

has been paid. Within minutes we are stopped again, this time at an official police checkpoint in Motaain. The police officer, Ketut, a transmigrasi from Bali, is quite amicable towards the tourist, but soon lashes out at Téos kicking him in the leg and hitting him several times in the midriff and head. Téos does not resist but stands with head bowed until knocked to the ground. "You call me stupid", Ketut screams threateningly as Téos picks himself up again. "Why did you hit him?" the tourist asks hoping to prevent any further violence. Ketut repeats the claim that Téos spoke unkindly to him. Later Téos reveals that he was beaten up for offering cigarettes instead of money. "If you were a policeman in Australia and you beat up someone like that you could be put in prison", the tourist ventures. "It is normal here", Ketut replies. "The Timorese people do not have discipline. They must learn", he adds though his eyes betray the hypocrisy of his words. Téos lies on the grass and appears to be concussed. Ketut's attention turns to Anwar, Johannes and other passengers the truck has picked up on the way. He seethes with contempt while interrogating a middle aged Timorese man whose ID has been liquid papered over since his occupation changed from village head to street vendor. The old man understands little Indonesian which further enrages Ketut. After a long hour Téos hands over 10,000 rupiah, the threat of jail is removed and after a group photo in which Téos squats at the feet that kicked him so recently, we are allowed to leave. Still Johannes and Anwar defend the system. They contend that the bribes are a form of retribution because the wooden wall panels have been taken from the environment and the money will be used to help the immediate community!

The next checkpoint is staffed by a Timorese police officer. There is no drama as Johannes explains the predicament and the police officer agrees to help. For a mere 5000 rupiah he writes a letter which may make the rest of our journey less expensive.

We decide to head inland and up towards Balibo. There is an eerie stillness and few people wave back as the tourist passes by. The policemen at the checkpoint are interested in talking to the tourist only. "You should return to the coastal road", the chief officer suggests. "There is little transport from here to Dili and entry into Dili will be prohibited from tomorrow. (security measure for the papal visit). The tourist explains that he already has a lift and bids the kind officers goodday. The mass graves by the roadside as we leave Balibo are testimony to the terror both past and present. We cross the Be Bol River and in the failing light press on towards Maliana. "They are all transmigrants from Bali", Johannes and Anwar explain motioning towards the farmers returning home from their fields. The next checkpoint is indeed staffed almost exclusively by Balinese, but fortunately 'singkarkar' (no problem). "It is easier at night as the policemen's families are also at the checkpoints and the policemen are not as hard".

Anwar, Téos and Johannes become more concerned as we reach Maliana. "You will eat here" they insist showing me to the door of a restaurant which bears photos of not only Suharto and Sudharmono, but also of a favourite son who has reached officer status with the army. All is understood as the officer himself appears and renews his acquaintance with Anwar and Johannes. On the outskirts of Maliana we enter a military barracks which serves also as a checkpoint. There is an overwhelming sensation of evil and Anwar and Johannes appear most fearful as we walk down the dimly lit road towards a large group of soldiers. Even the tourist decides that playing the fool is not likely to crack the icy stares that warn us to keep our distance and stand below the level of the commanding officer. Still, we depart unscathed. "We were most frightened about that checkpoint", said Anwar. "The soldiers there are very hard".

With the coming of the wet season, the surrounding hills glow from fires lit by Timorese villagers in order to prepare seeds and soil for the rains. "You can see the people lack discipline", Anwar claims. Johannes watches the road. "Remember when we had to choose whether to drive through the banana and palm forest, climb the hill or take the beach road?" asks the tourist. Anwar nods. "Remember how thick that forest was even though a fire had been through there not long ago. That's good farming", the tourist concludes. Anwar offers no reply. Johannes nods with approval when Anwar is not watching.

At Ermera the police must be woken. The junior officer wakes the second in charge who goes off to wake the commanding officer. After checking that we have fewer than 10 passengers and the goods we are carrying, we are waved on. We arrive in Dili just after the midnight curfew, (security procedure during the papal visit). The joint army and police checkpoint is immediately next to the camping grounds for the faithful thousands who have come to see the Pope. We pass without troube.

Tasi Tolu, the large field 15 kms. from central Dili, where the Pope will say mass in two days basks in the moonlight. According to Bishop Belo it was the place where many mnay people died, and now it has been divided into areas according to the different kabupatens in East Timor. If dissent is shown on Thursday it will be easily pinpointed to a place for future reference. All along the route from Tasi Tolu to Central Dili are Indonesian flags and signs welcoming the Pope to Indonesia's 27th province. The Pope is being used. The faithful thousands are being used. We are stopped by a man who rides on the back of the truck for a few blocks. "Intel", Johannes explains. It is later reported that in addition to the 13,000 military normally stationed in East Timor, an additional 30,000 are here for security reasons during the papal visit. Security, like justice, can only come through peace and respect. Such security is still just a flicker of hope in the hearts of the Timorese people.

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